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Award Number: DAMD17-01-1-0373

TITLE: Center for Behavioral Research: Individual
Interventions for Breast Cancer Patients

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REPORT DATE: September 2003

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: Approved for Public Release;
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20040105 135

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGEForm Approved
OMB No. 074-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE September 2003	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Annual (1 Sep 2002 - 31 Aug 2003)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Center for Behavioral Research: Individual Interventions for Breast Cancer Patients			5. FUNDING NUMBERS DAMD17-01-1-0373	
6. AUTHOR(S) Andrew Baum, Ph.D.				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) University of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260 E-Mail: baum@pitt.edu			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words) No Abstract Provided.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS No Subject Terms Provided.			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 6	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Unlimited	

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I. Introduction

This is an annual report for the Center for Biobehavioral Research in Breast Cancer, a center of excellence that was initially funded in September, 2001. The Center was designed to support, stimulate, conduct, and disseminate research and research reports on the biological and behavioral interactions characterizing the development and progression of breast cancer as well as treatment and survivor effects. Behavioral variables, particularly those directly related to activity in biological regulatory systems and defense systems, appear to be key determinants of participation in early detection and prevention programs, effective use of chemoprevention agents, and in patient adjustment, caregiving, and quality of life. This multidisciplinary Center is devoted to the investigation of biobehavioral pathways underlying breast cancer prevention and control, including development of research and training, involving participation by behavioral scientists, oncologists, nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, immunologists, and molecular biologists. These activities are directed towards organization, stimulation, and facilitation of integrated biobehavioral research aimed at prevention and control of breast cancer. The Center has assembled an interacting group of behavioral, biological, and medical scientists to foster new collaborations and extend existing ones in the context of training and education about breast cancer. These training opportunities, free exchange of ideas, and regular interaction will supplement and connect research activity on proposed projects as well as research cores that support this research. Integration of theory, cross-cutting research themes, and multidisciplinary training has begun to produce novel ways of thinking about breast cancer research and innovative, patient-focused research activity.

II. Body

This section summarizes research accomplishments associated with our approved statement of work. Under normal circumstances, research findings would be presented and discussed and relevant publications would be appended. However, this is complicated by the fact that this is a Center project with numerous objectives among cores and research projects, and that funding for major parts of the Center's activity have not yet been released for our use due to continuing delays in obtaining IRB approval and human subjects reviews by the granting agency. We have secured approval by the University of Pittsburgh IRB twice since this project was proposed. It has been reviewed scientifically by the peer review panel and by the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute Protocol Review committee. All of these approvals were obtained in a timely fashion. Delays in final approval by the granting agency have made it impossible to begin research on the two Center projects and have curtailed overall Center activity, as the planned research constitutes a major component of Center life. Nonetheless, some Center activities have begun and preparations for the research projects have been completed so that

when final approvals are forthcoming the Center can immediately operate at full strength.

The statement of work for the administrative core of the Center includes orientation to the goals of the Center (introduction with faculty and medical staff who will be involved, delineation of education and training objectives, establishment of committees, derivation of a calendar of events including monthly seminars, offering opportunities to trainees for involvement in Center activities), solicitation of applications for training positions and competitive review of these applications, attendance at monthly seminars, and attendance in activities of the Comprehensive Breast Center clinical conferences. These activities have been initiated and for the most part have been accomplished to the extent possible due to the delays noted above. Orientation activities have been completed and activities such as monthly seminars and bi-weekly research conferences have been conducted over the past 12 months. A calendar of events was not developed but rather our events have been integrated into a single calendar of events used in the local (Pittsburgh) behavioral medicine community by way of a list serve that supports faculty and others at the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie-Mellon University, and the UPMC Health System.

Requests for training applications continued and a number of outstanding pre- and post-doctoral applications were competitively reviewed. Two pre-doctoral trainees continued in the Clinical and Health Psychology programs at the University of Pittsburgh. One, Tamara Somers, is interested in anxiety and patient adjustment to having breast cancer and the other, Amanda Midboe is interested in psychological trauma and neuropsychological sequelae of breast cancer chemoprevention. Ms. Somers has completed the first wave of data collection for her masters' research, evaluating anxiety and adjustment in early stage breast cancer patients. Several outstanding applications (9) for post-doctoral training were also received and one applicant was accepted after competitive review. Current fellows include Heidi Hamann, who is interested in genetic testing for breast cancer risk and will participate in development of research in that area, and Elizabeth Mundy, interested in psychological trauma. The new fellow, Melanie Flint, Ph.D., who comes to us from NIOSH in Morgantown, West Virginia and is interested in PNI. In addition, Center members have attended seminars and research meetings as well as clinical conferences when relevant.

The website summarizing scientific findings and training opportunities in the Center is in development. Because of continuing delays in initiation of research activities, this has been delayed until year 03.

III. Key Research Accomplishments
None (see above)

IV. Reportable outcomes
None (see above)

V. Conclusions

The activities of the Center have been sharply curtailed by delays in final human subjects review and in release of funds for the research core and projects in the Center. Training, development of content for seminars and research meetings, and conduct of the research have been affected and produced suboptimal conditions for development of the Center. Consequently, our accomplishments for the first year are not what had been anticipated and the relative lack of activity is reflected in the length of this report. Nonetheless, all objectives and tasks that could be completed have been save one, and most of the support from year 01 has been conserved so that activities can increase immediately once approvals and release of funds are achieved. We have been successful in meeting training objectives and establishing the basic core of the Center.